

# PLANETERRA NULLIUS: A POST-APOCALYPTIC PARABLE

BY WILLIAM LEMPERT

January 18, 2388

They are back, and this time they are here to stay.

It's Tuesday and I am running predictably behind. I click ACCEPT, paying 3000 credits as I shift into the express skyway.

It's then that I first hear it, that sickening low drone that slowly overtakes the cacophony of the Sydney rush hour. Traffic slows, then stops. The 50-degree morning air rushes in as I release the top hatch, squinting skyward toward the trapezoidal silhouettes.

As the nine shadows spread across the metropolis, my pupils dilate to take in the crafts and their implications. Reassembling into a single tessellation, they settle into an inlet just south of the city.

Never had there been so many.

The first contacts were brief and shrouded in mystery. For hundreds of years there have been glimpses of the *Snaeporue*, who most people referred to simply as the "Blues." Early rumors of vague shapes on the horizon.

Stories over the years accumulated in the north, of spacecraft, cyan skin, and strange weapons: 2206 in Cape York, again in 2223. Whispers from the west at the end of the 23rd century.

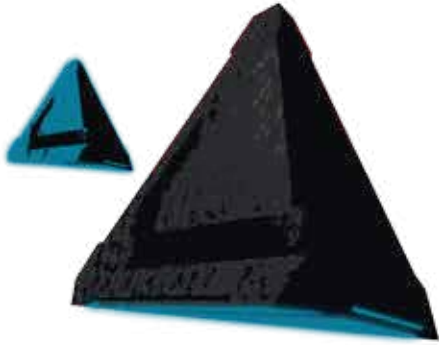
I was a child when their first spaceship visited Sydney, 18 short years ago. We approached with hope. It ended badly. Their quickness to anger, the bright flashes, the carnage. They took our weapons and as quickly as they arrived, they were gone.

My parents said that they wouldn't return and not to worry. I tried not to, until the blue skin sickness overcame them.

My fingernails dig into my palm as the memories come rushing back, the cocktail of scarlet and salt trickling from mom's pale eyes over cerulean-spotted cheeks.

She was wrong.

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January 26, 2617

It's nearly 2am when I look up from the datapad of my many-great grandfather's journal in the digital archives at *The Institute for Egavas Studies* in Canberra. After years of study I am reading in the original English, and for the first time I can feel his voice reverberating through my bones. I collect myself as I'm momentarily overwhelmed by how much is left out of our official histories.

I saturate my lungs with air and blood with caffeine, then continue:

Over a thousand Blues moor above the southern bay. We fight back as part of the new pan-Earth alliance of hundreds of nations. We kill some, as they take out waves of our troops and abduct our emissaries.

Days blur together as Sydney descends into chaos. A new wave of skin sickness claims billions worldwide while the Blues spread and more ships arrive.

Most of our diplomats die, but the ones that return talk of a planet called *Eporue*, where they mastered their *Hsilgne* language and met Emperor Egroeg.

We learn that the Blues view us as lesser beings and call us *Egavas*. Their society runs on the very magma that runs through our planet. Since we do not harvest the liquid rock, they have claimed Earth as theirs through a distortion of intergalactic law, declaring it as *planeterra nullius*, or "nobody's planet."

Emboldened, we organize resistance movements and move toward the desert...

I read for hours moving from this journal to others, eager to hear my ancestors and absorb their knowledge. Endless pages of massacres, disease, and stolen children give way to myriad moments of courage and triumph.

Against all odds, *planeterra nullius* was overturned in *Snaeporuen* court only a couple of decades ago, leading to the *Egavas Title Act* through which I, along with the other descendants, helped to secure rights in and around Sydney.

Despite hundreds of years of struggle, we not only survived, but are growing in strength and numbers. No one can deny that we are actively fighting to determine our futures on Earth, and now even many Blues support our centuries-overdue treaty.

My eyes move from screen to window as the sun edges over the horizon, bathing cavernous shadows in the light of dawn.

## WILLIAM LEMPERT | 2014 POSTGRADUATE

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William is a PhD candidate in cultural anthropology from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

With the support of Fulbright, he recently completed his fourth and primary research trip of 20-months to Northwestern Australia, where he collaborated with Indigenous media organizations on production teams to follow the social life cycles of their film projects.

William has written articles and blogs on the rise of sci-fi futures in Indigenous films, and he hopes that this speculative parable, set exactly 600 years after European contact, will help to edify Australian perspectives on Aboriginal history, justice, and sovereignty.

